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## AN EXTRAORDINARY HOAX.

A most extraordinary hoax has recently taken place in France. There is in that country a most respectable ecclesiastic and man of letters, the Abbé Domenech, who has lived many years as a missionary among the Indians in Mexico and the adjacent portions of the continent, and written a curious book on the subject, which has been translated into English, and may be seen in the Boston Athenæum. It further appears that in the library of the Arsenal,—once the library of the Marquis de Paulmy,—there is, and has been for many years, at the bottom of a box, a manuscript without a name, but designated as "Livre des Sauvages,"—Book of the Savages, or Indians. The librarian drew to it the attention of the Abbé Domenech, as one who had lived among the Indians of North America, and could no doubt make out its meaning. The good Abbé, more credulous than wise, was very much struck with it, and deemed it a very important contribution to history. He hurried with it to M. Walewski, praying that it might be fac-similed at the public expense, and intimating that the American Government would be only too happy to have the honor and glory of ushering this precious treasure to the world, if that of France were so unwise as to reject the golden opportunity. M. Walewski is pretty sharp on ordinary occasions, but he had the glamour cast over him by the enthusiastic Abbé. The gates of the treasury were opened, and the manuscript was lithographed and reproduced at the public cost. The Abbé composed for it a learned introduction upon North American "Ideography" in general, together with a commentary explaining the meaning of the symbols in the manuscript. For the manuscript was almost wholly composed of symbols, hieroglyphics, or rude pictorial designs, in which the Abbé Domenech found records of battles, treaties, emigrations, deaths, and the introduction of Christianity among the Indians. Many of the symbols were of a kind which—not to put too coarse a point upon it—would render the book an unfit appendage to a drawing-room table; and this false scent leads off the unsuspecting Abbé into all sorts of slippery bye-paths, and discussions about sundry ancient forms of mystic worship, well known to such scholars as have a taste for raking in the gutters of the past. We give the title of the volume, as it was published: "*Manuscrit Pictographique Américain, précédé d'une Notice sur l'Ideographie des Peaux-Rouges.* Par l'Abbé Domenech. Ouvrage publié sous les Auspices de M. le Ministre de l'Etat et de la Maison de l'Empereur. Paris: Gide. 1860."

We have said that the manuscript was almost wholly composed of symbols or designs; but it was not entirely so. The Abbé noticed and referred to certain alphabetic or syllabic signs, occasionally occurring, which appeared to be of Teutonic origin, which puzzled him a little, for which he presented no solution. Alas for the Abbé! whose fate was like that of the astronomer in the fable, who tumbled into a well while following the movements of a star through his glass. He had a great deal of curious and useless lore, but wanted one piece of useful knowledge—a little acquaintance with the German language. It was by these alphabetic symbols that he came to grief. As soon as any one with a German eye in his head looked at these, all the Abbé's elaborate structure of learned speculation disappeared like the airy pageant with which Prospero entertained his guests on his enchanted island. These were German words, written in the German handwriting and badly spelt in some cases. For instance, there was an uncouth-looking vessel delineated, which the Abbé took to be a barrel of rum, and disserted accordingly; but underneath was written the German word *honig* (honey), showing that the object was really a beehive. The long and short of the story is, that the manuscript proved to be nothing more or less than the copy-book of a coarse and idle German schoolboy, with some talent for design, who instead of minding his work, employed himself in caricaturing familiar scenes and objects, much like idle schoolboys all the world over. There is a frequently recurring scene, in which a birch rod plays a conspicuous part—of which, doubtless, the reprobate young artist had had many a feeling reminiscence—which the Abbé, whose withers, we presume, were never wrung in that way, reads as meaning "a medicine man seeking for supernatural power in the entrails of a spirit."

With what delight the news of this hoax was received among the Germans may well be conceived. The French are great masters in the art of making fun of their neighbors, and the Teutons frequently expose themselves to be made game of in this way; it is not often that Germania gets such a chance to avenge itself upon Gallia. Since the battle of Leipsic, there has been no such national triumph as the Abbé Domenech's publication has occasioned. Dr. Petzholst, of Berlin, has published a pamphlet, which is a long shout of victory over a fallen foe. As for the Abbé Domenech, the best thing he can do is to crawl into the box from which his manuscript was taken, and remain there the rest of his life.

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## THE HIEROGLYPHIC HOAX.*

WE owe the Abbé Domenech some apology for not having yet noticed a work which is likely to secure him a place in the memory of literary men for a very long time to come. And we feel that the apology is the more due, because the work comes out under the *exequatur* of even a higher authority than himself. It appears at the cost of the Imperial Treasury, and under the personal auspices of the Minister of State. It purports to be the publication of a relic which undoubtedly ought to be curious — a Red Indian manuscript. It appears that in the library of the Arsenal—once the library of the Marquis de Paulmy—there exists, and has existed for a considerable number of years, at the bottom of a box, a manuscript which bears no name itself, but is designated in the catalogue by the mysterious title of "*Livre des Sauvages.*" The Abbé justly observes that the library of the Arsenal was not exactly the place where you would anticipate the discovery of such a monument, and that probably there is no other similar relic in the world. The evidence of its being of Red Indian origin appears to have been entirely internal; at least the external testimony to that fact is confined to the mysterious and laconic entry in the catalogue. But the keeper of the library, M. Paul La Croix, drew his attention to it, as one who had lived in Red Indian territory, and could no doubt decipher Red Indian writing. The good Abbé's mind is full of faith to the brim, as appears sufficiently from the legends with which he entertains his readers in the historical disquisitions of some of his former works. He received it nothing doubting, and was so struck by its value, that he took it to M. Walewski with the intimation that, if the French Government did not take it up, the American Government would. M. Walewski seems also to be gifted with as great a docility of belief as if he had been an Apostolic missionary all his life. It was the *rôle* of himself and his master to play Mecænas and Augustus, whenever the stern exigencies of political necessity did not force them to be Vandals against their will. No difficulties were therefore made; the money was forthcoming; and the *Livre des Sauvages* was lithographed *in extenso*. The Abbé composed for it an erudite introduction upon North American "Ideography" in general; and also accompanied it with a commentary in which the probable interpretation of the mystic symbols that filled its pages was learnedly set forth. His rendering is certainly open to the criticism that it is disjointed, and leaves no very coherent impression upon the reader's mind. But if this be so, it is undoubtedly the fault of the manuscript and not of the interpreter; for the Abbé is as bold a commentator as a truth-loving Frenchman need be. He finds in its pages medicine-men, and spirits, and chieftains, and wigwams in abundance—records of treaties, deaths, wars, emigrations, and (of course) of the introduction of Christianity among the tribes. He even discovers a picture of the Fall, a representation of a priest in the act of elevation at the mass, and several other allusions to the practices of the Roman Catholic religion. But these do not form the burden of the pictorial chronicles of the Red Men. The mass of the *Livre des Sauvages* consists of representations which would have made the late Lord Chancellor's blood run cold, but which only call up in the Abbé's passionless mind memories of the mystic worships of the ancient world. He reminds his readers of the *culte du phallus, du priape, et du lingam*—he remembers the symbol of Ceres and the sorrows of Osiris; and even discovers a sect of Indians whose

* *Manuscrit Pictographique Américain, précédé d'une Notice sur l'Ideographie des Peaux-Rouges.* Par l'Abbé Em. Domenech. Ouvrage publié sous les Auspices de M. le Ministre de l'Etat et de la Maison de l'Empereur. Paris: Gide. London: Jeffs. 1860.

*Das Buch der Wilden im Lichte Französischer Civilization.* Von J. Petzholdt. Dresden: Schönfeldt. London: Williams and Norgate. 1861.

mysteries seem to be worthy to rank by the side of those of the *Bona Dea*. He plunges into these matters with all the cold, anatomical precision of a Sanchez; and, in truth, if he had not been endowed with a confessor's callousness, three quarters of his author must have been left uncommented. After more than a hundred pages devoted to disquisitions of this kind, the Abbé finishes by solemnly committing his labours to the charge of the archæologists and learned societies of America, with the just observation that their task will be a serious one, inasmuch as his manuscript contains a multitude of symbols hitherto unknown in Indian inscriptions. But he is confident, nevertheless, that he is founding a new science—that ultimately he shall attain the same results for American inscriptions which have already been achieved for those of Egypt and the East—and that before long the science will be so far advanced that the manuscript of the Arsenal "sera lu couramment d'un bout à l'autre."

It was a beautiful dream, and, if prosaic facts had allowed some respite, would no doubt have been easily realized. The ingenuity of scientific men would have succeeded in extracting a story of some kind out of that or any other set of hieroglyphics under the sun. But, unfortunately, the Abbé, having an imperial purse at his command, was too candid. He lithographed the whole of the mysterious book from beginning to end, down to the very last symbol, and so it was discovered that there was one portion—one very little portion—of the mystic relic, to which he had forborne to apply his vigorous exegesis. He notices the existence, here and there, of symbols which he calls "alphabetic or syllabic," but no solution of their meaning presents itself to his mind at once, and therefore he resolves to reserve them for deeper reflection at some other time. Some of them, he sees, "if not English or German, are at least of Teutonic origin;" but this suspicion conveys no misgiving to his mind. Probably a vision floated across it of some still more startling discovery, which should revolutionize the whole science of race and language, and place the original home of the Aryan race among the valleys of the Rocky Mountains. Unluckily, the book fell into the hands of critics of a more prosaic turn of mind, who possessed an accomplishment which the Abbé has neglected to add to his stores of learning. This one thing wanting was an acquaintance with the German language. The moment any one who is even slightly acquainted with that abstruse dialect glances at the book, the whole of the Abbé Domenech's splendid erection of Indian hieroglyphics, mystic sects, phallus-worship, introduction of Christianity, and the rest, falls to the ground. The "alphabetic and syllabic symbols" are simply German words written in a childish hand, in the current German character, and not remarkably well spelt. There are upwards of five-and-twenty of them in various parts of the book, consisting of all the commonest words that a little boy who was learning to write would scribble down. The mysterious manuscript is nothing but the copy-book of a dirty little German boy, the son of some emigrant to America, who amused himself with drawing when he ought to have been doing his lessons. The favourite subjects of his pencil were, of course, the objects and events most familiar to him. A little knowledge of this youth's vernacular might have saved the Abbé from a tissue of ludicrous blunders. An uncouth-looking vessel is interpreted by him to represent a barrel of fire-water, and to be the record of some Red Indian bartering expedition of which it was the fruit: but if he had only possessed the abstruse accomplishment we have mentioned, the word "honig," written very plainly beneath, might have betrayed to him the fact that it was only a bee-hive. One of the most frequent subjects of the young artist's efforts is what the Abbé would call a "scène scholastique," in which the birch-rod plays a prominent part. No doubt it was a scene with

which, if the little boy's natural guardians did not very much neglect their duty, he must have been exceedingly familiar. Such discipline is presumably unknown in France, for the Abbé gravely interprets the attitudes, which are intelligible and familiar enough to most English eyes, as "a medicine-man seeking for supernatural powers in the entrails of a spirit." There are other blunders of a still more comical character, but which, on account of the delicacy of the subject, we must forbear to particularize; for this budding artist was a very nasty little boy, and wanted more the skill than the knowledge to emulate the two Roman friends of Aretino. The pedagogue especially, who was the author of the inflictions to which we have alluded, comes in for an amount of vigorous satire, of a Fescennine character, which we will only trust, for the little boy's sake, never met his eyes.

The shout of derisive delight with which this discovery of the Abbé's was received, as soon as it penetrated across the German frontier, may well be imagined. Dr. Petzholdt's pamphlet is a long pæan of triumph over his prostrate foe. Frenchmen are in the habit of speaking so contemptuously of their German neighbours, that such an opportunity was not to be lost. If it could teach some wholesome doubts as to the omniscience with which every Frenchman is supposed to be born, the blunder will have had its moral uses. Perhaps it may convey to the Abbé Domenech a glimmering suspicion that a smart pen and a missionary's experience do not, of themselves, make an archæologist, and to M. Walewski that the rudiments of knowlege are necessary to enable even an Imperial favourite to play the part of Mecænas with effect. An act of justice, however, remains to be done. They have no right to neglect the humble instrument that has promoted the Emperor's Government to this great literary honour. They ought to seek out without delay the youthful artist who has been the occasion of so great a display of learning, and present him to the world. It is not every day that the leisure pencillings of a nasty-minded little boy have the honour of being lithographed and edited at an Emperor's expense, and hoaxing a polite and learned capital. The public have a right to a closer acquaintance with the hero—if he be still alive—who is the author of so unexampled a good joke.

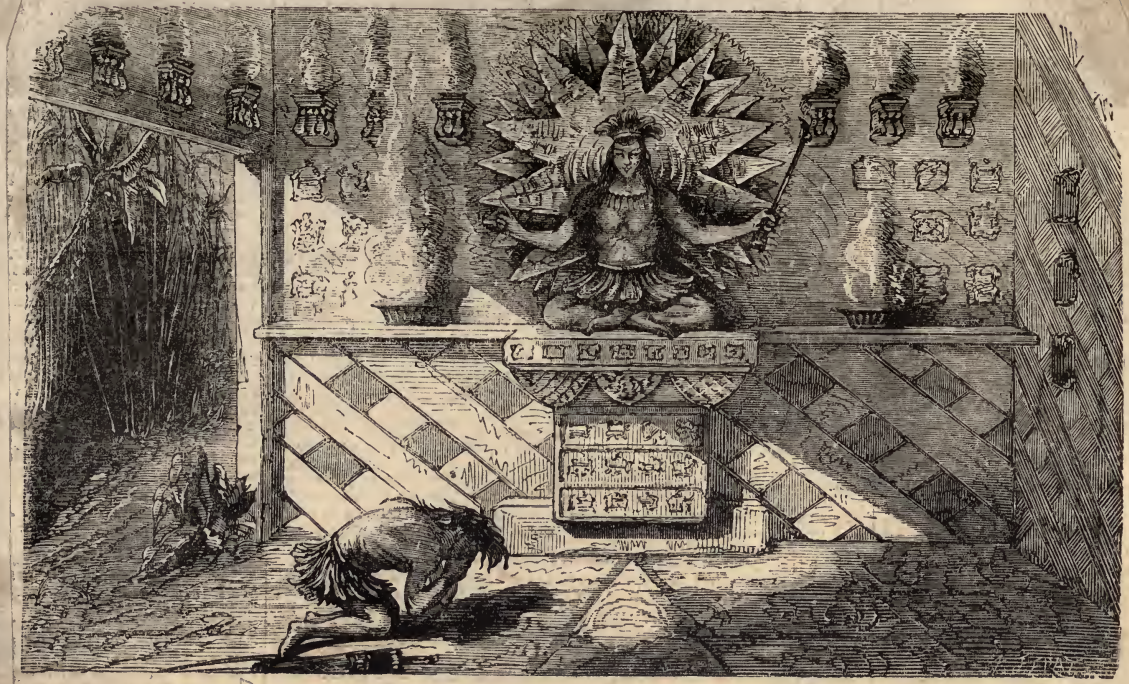
THE TOWN OF BACHAJOU.

Bancroft Library

FLOATING GARDENS.

March 24, 1860

# DISCOVERIES IN CENTRAL AMERICA.



INTERIOR OF AN INDIAN TEMPLE.

ALTAR IN THE FOREST.

TOMBS OF INDIANS IN THE FOREST.

RUINS OF OSTUTA.

## THE CHEVALIER DE PONTELLI'S DISCOVERIES IN CENTRAL AMERICA.

A CELEBRATED traveller, the Chevalier de Pontelli, has lately been exploring Central America. We give extracts from his letters, which cannot fail to interest our readers :—

'After having traversed a great part of Africa and of Asia, and visited Southern America in its whole extent, my scientific researches conducted me to Central America, where I have passed three consecutive years. From the isthmus of Panama to Tehuantepec, I have explored everything, and it is thus that I have had the good fortune to discover a country entirely unknown in geography.

'The most interesting portion of the country is situated at one of the limits of the Mexican Empire of the State of Chiapas. It occupies a very extensive surface in the southern part of Mexico, and on the Pacific Ocean. It embraces about 19,000 square leagues. Watered by a multitude of rivers and of rapid and sinuous canals, this land, intersected by high mountains, brought Switzerland so warmly to my mind—the country where my youth was spent, that I immediately called it the "American Switzerland."

'The numerous ruins with which the soil is covered deeply interested me. Countless tombs of ancient warriors and of their families still bear hieroglyphical traces, and are covered with ancient sculptures. With astonishment and admiration we come upon the tombs of kings—find here a sarcophagus and there a tower; see everywhere the ruins of palaces, beautiful mosaics, aqueducts well preserved, but in part buried under the soil, square towers of the very finest porphyry and jasper. The beauty of the ruins surpasses everything which can be imagined. Some of these I shall briefly attempt to describe :—

INTERIOR OF A TEMPLE.

'The idol is placed in a sun formed of mother-of-pearl, of silver, and of gold. Hieroglyphics are everywhere visible. This sanctuary is continually illuminated by a fire of odorous essences, and adorned with a pavement in Mosaic, representing flowers of every kind.

THE TOWN OF BACHAJOU.

'The Chieftain of the country and his Council reside at Bachajou, on the top of a mountain. The houses are always built of bamboo. The house of the chieftain is the loftiest, and is surrounded by palm trees planted symmetrically.

TOMBS IN THE FOREST.

'The tomb in the middle is flanked on each side by a warrior holding a trophy. When any one visits this place of the dead, the Indian guard follows with a quiet vigilance the steps of the visitors. An arrow or a poniard would quickly put a stop to any attempt to examine the tombs more completely and closely.

ALTAR IN THE FOREST.

'Interlaced with serpents, this altar received the blood of victims. On the pedestal are inscribed hieroglyphical signs. A little brook flows to the foot of the altar, and there disappears. According to tradition, the priest plucked the heart from the victim, held it up to the people, and then devoted it to the divinity.

RUINS OF OSTUTA.

'These are situated in an exceedingly picturesque position. This town, formerly the residence of the chieftains, extended along a river, in a magnificent valley, surrounded by mountains. From one of the summits we beheld the ruins of an ancient palace, and the whole valley lies before us, with its countless remains, and its infinite natural beauties.

FLOATING GARDENS.

'Nothing is more picturesque than these gardens, which swim on the lakes like boats. Houses are constructed on them, and vegetables and flowers of every kind are cultivated. Festivals are celebrated on them, and they are favourite fishing stations by night and by day.'

Gaceta de Guatemala
Aug. 7. 1860

PRETENDIDOS DESCUBRIMIENTOS DEL SR. PONTELLI.—Insertamos hoy un Remitido que se refiere á ciertos supuestos descubrimientos de poblaciones desconocidas hasta ahora, que dice haber hecho en esta República un Sr. Leon de Pontelli que estuvo en esta ciudad hace poco tiempo, ocupado en dar lecciones de litografía. Habiamos visto los artículos relativos á esos maravillosos descubrimientos publicados por la *Illustration* de Paris y despues por el *Correo de Ultramar*; y desde luego nos pareció que habia en esas relaciones tan notorias inverosimilitudes, que no creimos pudiesen engañar á ninguna persona que tenga un mediano conocimiento de la geografía y de la historia de este país. Por esto habiamos dejado desapercibido el romance de Mr. Pontelli, cuyo testo va acompañado de retratos y vistas de los pretendidos habitantes del pais que supone haber descubierto, de los lugares que ocupan &c. Creiamos que la fábula de los *Niños aztecas*, [que no eran mas que unos pobres indizuelos de Usulutan] acogida con tanta facilidad en Europa no hace mucho tiempo, habria hecho mas cautas alla á muchas personas; pero la inclinacion á lo maravilloso puede mas que los desengaños, y los que conocen ese lado debil de la humanidad, no dejan ni dejarán jamas de esplotarlo en su provecho. El Sr. Pontelli, con su territorio de 19,000! leguas cuadradas [que no las tiene todo Centro-América] sus seiscientos mil combatientes! [mas de dos tercios de toda la poblacion de Guatemala] sus salvages con botas federicas y pistolas de dos cañones, ha compuesto una novela que podria tal vez ocupar el folletin de un diario como obra de imaginacion, pero que no debió encontrar cabida entre las cosas serias ni merecer la atencion de personas respetables como lo son algunas de las que parecen haber dado crédito á sus imaginarios descubrimientos.

## REMITIDO.

Coban Julio de 1860.

Sr. Redactor de la "Gaceta oficial de Guatemala."—Muy apreciable Sr. mio.—Me tomo la libertad de dirijir á U. algunos cortos renglones con el propósito de llamar su atencion acerca de descubrimientos fabulosos que se habrian hecho últimamente en Centro América, hácia las fronteras de esta República y que han llamado á tal punto la atencion de Europa, que no se titubea en colocar al autor de tamaños descubrimientos al lado de los mas famosos viajeros conocidos como Cook, Bourgainville, Magallanes, etc. Sin duda U. habrá leido las descripciones harto abreviadas publicadas últimamente por el "Correo de Ultramar" (números 375 y 378 de la parte ilustrada) acompañados de muchos grabados que se refieren á puntos si bien hasta ahora desconocidos, demasiado cercanos de nosotros para no excitar nuestro interes y averiguar si es posible la autenticidad de semejantes datos. No disimularé á U. el asombro que me ha causado la lectura de los relatos del señor Leon de Pontelli, quien, viajero atrevido, como no ha habido hasta ahora, sin esceptuar aun á la famosa señora Beecher, se ha internado en el pais de los Lacandones arrostrando toda clase de peligros, haciendo aun de misionero, pues dice haber bautizado á los hijos de un poderoso gefe de aquellas tribus llamado el *Leon de los Andes*, y á muchos otros de sus mismos súbditos. Sin embargo, sin atreverme á poner en duda las espediciones arriesgadas del señor de Pontelli, creo haber descubierto en algunas de sus relaciones varias cosas demasiado increibles y que no se admitirian tan facilmente entre nosotros como en el seno de las sociedades geográficas de Europa, para las cuales sirven de un alimento tanto mas necesario hoy dia, cuanto que parece haber poco que descubrir en nuestro viejo planeta. Muy sensible es en todo caso para los hijos de Guatemala, saber que existe dentro de su territorio (pues la alta Verapaz comprende al pais de los Lacandones, si bien no está aun conquistado;) un pais tan rico, tan poblado, ignorado de todos hasta la fecha, y cuya conquista parece prometer tanto que seria capaz de atraer á un nuevo Hernan Cortés.